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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

ELTAP fulfils Zaq Clemens' quest for South American experience

Summary: A search for international experience on an interactive level led Zaq Clemens '08, Minneapolis, to participate in the University of Minnesota, Morris' English Language Teaching Assistant Program (ELTAP).

(April 10, 2007)-A search for international experience on an interactive level led Zaq Clemens '08, Minneapolis, to participate in the University of Minnesota, Morris' English Language Teaching Assistant Program (ELTAP). ELTAP students share knowledge of their own culture and language with teachers and students studying English in 26 different countries. By doing so, they become part of another culture and community—living, serving, learning, and making a difference in the lives of others.

Clemens chose Chile for his ELTAP experience. The Spanish and international studies major arrived in Chile on March 24, 2007. For 10 weeks, he will work with the English department at The Mackay School, a British traditional school for boys from kindergarten through 12th grade celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Clemens works with one sixth grade class and two seventh grade classes, assisting the teachers with pre-planned lessons mainly focusing on grammar and reading comprehension. He also assists students from eighth grade through senior year in small groups or pairs, working mostly with oral English and helping them prepare for various exams that have spoken components.

Clemens shares comments about his ELTAP experience through a question and answer session.

Are you enjoying teaching at The Mackay School?

I'm enjoying teaching fine, though I initially had some doubts about working with students without previous formal training. One of the best parts of teaching is working with students in small groups. I get to know them on a more personal level and see their language skills improve as they become more comfortable and confident when talking to me. I'd say the hardest part of teaching is trying to make sure the students view me as a teacher primarily, and not as just a friend there to have a good time with them.

Why did you choose Chile for your ELTAP country?

I actually decided to go to Chile before applying to the ELTAP program. I have traveled to other countries but never South America. I wanted to improve my spoken Spanish, Unfortunately in Chile, people speak quickly and don't enunciate—though I suppose if I learn to understand them, I can understand anybody's Spanish!

What are your living arrangements?

I'm living in a very nice house in Reñaca, Viña del Mar, on the coast towards the middle of Chile, near Valparaíso. I have a host family of five, two girls (15 and 10), and one boy (12), who attend the school where I teach. The school is about a 10-minute walk from the house. We live about a 15-minute walk from the beach, though I have yet to go swimming. The water is very cold from the current coming up from Antarctica. There's a good view and a nice path that

runs along the beach. I spend most of my free time around the house, either in the pool, on the trampoline, or talking with my host father and drinking good, cheap Chilean wine.

How has UMM helped prepare you for this program?

Other than the obvious answer of Spanish classes, I think the University experience itself has taught me greater independence, which has been crucial to my survival in my travels. I also worked as a teacher's assistant in physical anthropology which gave me practice as well as patience when working with students and in correcting their assignments.

What do you hope to gain from this experience?

I hope to get a better idea of both my capabilities and my limitations as a teacher. I hope to someday become certified in teaching the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) tests in various countries.

Photo: Zaq Clemens and students from The Mackay School

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